
PARTICIPATORY MONITORING AND EVALUATION IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT: CAPITALIZING ON THE CHARM2 EXPERIENCE

Cecil B. Capegsan



A participatory monitoring and evaluation process was successfully applied as part of the Second Cordillera Highland Agricultural Resource Management Project, CHARM2. This is a special project implemented by the Philippines Department of Agriculture and is the second phase of the 1998-2004 CHARM1 project. This case study explores the work of the Barangay Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation Teams (BPMETs) in the 35 administrative divisions or *barangays* covered by CHARM2 in the province of Benguet. It shows how the information generated by the BPMETs has had an impact on policy making processes, and how the support provided for community empowerment initiatives continues to have a positive effect.

Monitoring projects is one of the most difficult and sensitive aspects of development interventions. Especially in remote areas where access is difficult, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is sometimes taken for granted, leading to poor project implementation. This difficulty is often compounded by the limited manpower and financial resources of implementing agencies, and the fact that the deference of local cultures to those in authority can lead to passivity and acceptance.

The Second Cordillera Highland Agricultural Resource Management Project (CHARM2) established different Barangay Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation Teams (BPMETs) composed of groups of local community volunteers whose roles and responsibilities were recognised by the *barangay* itself. Their task was to monitor and evaluate CHARM's impact. The BPMETs were asked to monitor all project activities and provide the project administration and implementing units with information. This is particularly important because partner organisations and the Local Government Units (LGU) often lack the manpower to carry out these tasks, especially in far-flung areas. The BPMETs also showed how implementation problems could be recognised and reported as quickly as possible to the proper authorities, and thus encourage solutions.

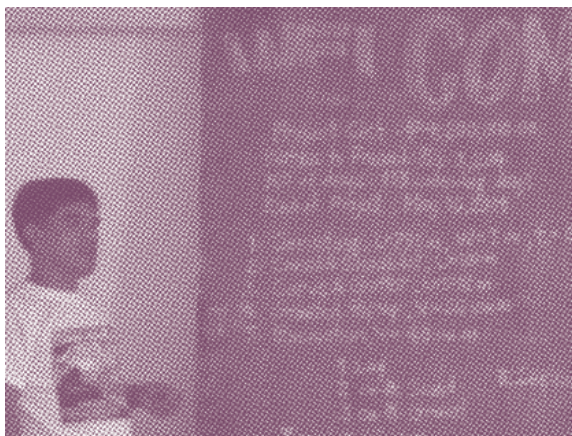
Organising the BPMETs

While the monitoring structures of both the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and the Local Government Units (LGUs) are formal and implemented by salaried government staff and officials, BPMET members are volunteers. They are identified at the beginning of a specific project, usually during a *barangay* meeting, when the concept of participatory M&E is introduced and discussed. Roles and functions are explained and those prepared to take on this responsibility take an oath in front of the community to faithfully carry out their responsibilities.

Those involved are then introduced to contractors and workers during the pre-bid and pre-construction conference. Some *barangays* passed resolutions recognizing the BPMETs and this proved important when contractors and workers were not prepared to accept their involvement. While BPMETs were specifically organised to monitor CHARM projects, they were directly responsible to the community and peoples' organisations and not to the project.

BPMET members were trained in project M&E systems and procedures. This included the steps for determining roles and functions during the different stages of a project; enumerating the steps involved in the M&E process of CHARM2 and related projects; understanding M&E reporting and feedback systems;

Cover Members of a BPMET are presented and their roles and responsibilities are explained to contractors of rural infrastructure projects in the field. This helps all stakeholders share their concerns about the project, and then minimise conflicts during the monitoring activities of the BPMET



Above left The federation of peoples' organisations in Benguet, the Benguet Provincial Indigenous Forest Guardians, maintains seedling nurseries for forest and agroforestry trees to ensure a continuous supply of seedlings for their reforestation projects



Above right BPMET members have helped make their communities more aware of the projects' intentions and results

understanding the different project monitoring tools and techniques; practicing writing monitoring reports; getting hands-on experience in the M&E of an ongoing project and following up on agreed actions. Subsequently, continuous capacity building included conducting provincial and regional forums to share experiences and learn from other BPMETs.

Roles, functions and activities

The unpublished guidebook, "Participatory M&E: Experience from CHARM communities", explains that the foremost role of the BPMETs is to monitor the implementation of a project. BPMETs do this as an independent body and as representatives of the community vis-à-vis the implementing, oversight and funding agencies. BPMET activities are not limited to the CHARM funded subprojects, but also involve other projects implemented in the *barangays* and funded by the local government units, the *barangays* themselves and other agencies. The BPMETs claim that it is part of their function, their right and responsibility to monitor projects implemented in the *barangays* as they themselves are also beneficiaries and end users.

Monitoring schedules vary between teams. Some BPMETs have a fixed monitoring schedule, for example, in reforestation, agroforestry and livelihood projects, which are monitored four times per project

cycle; while in infrastructure projects this has been limited to three times. Teams work before, during and after project implementation. Some visit implementation sites when materials such as aggregates used in construction projects are delivered. Others monitor ongoing projects daily, alternating members as necessary.

The BPMETs must also regularly prepare and submit monitoring reports. In addition to verbal reports, written reports are prepared after every major activity. Their frequency depends on the urgency of the action required. Reports are prepared and submitted to the offices and agencies concerned, such as the Municipal Planning and Development Office, the Municipal Engineering Office and the CHARM2 office. BPMETs also prepare and deliver reports to the Municipal Management Group (MMG), which is the implementing and management arm of the project at a municipal level. Authorised officials and project staff validate the reports in the field. Recommendations need to be regularly monitored to see if they are being implemented. However, it appears that this particular function is not yet recognised by BPMETs as being a part of their activities.

Overcoming a series of difficulties

BPMET members can experience physical and financial problems when monitoring activities.



The lack of sufficient logistical support and the impact on their personal relations with the community and other stakeholders affected by the monitoring process is often difficult to deal with.

Personal difficulties include the time spent away from their regular livelihood activities and the loss of income when they are monitoring activities or attending meetings, trainings and other activities organised by the project. No monetary compensation is provided by the project or the LGUs. When asked about their difficulties, BPMET members stressed the need for financial resources and, if possible, a *sweldo* (salary). Other issues identified by both male and female respondents included the difficulty in reaching remote project sites. Like all areas in the Cordillera Region, project areas in Benguet are characterised by steep and high mountains. Some communities can

only be reached by means of footpaths and this entails walking for many hours. The most difficult projects to monitor are communal irrigation and domestic water systems projects. These require BPMET members to visit water sources that are usually many kilometres away from the community.

Monitoring also involves personal hazards. Personal safety was particularly at risk when BPMET services were required during the typhoon season. During the training sessions, each BPMET participant was provided with monitoring and measuring tools, flashlights, record books and pens. However, protective clothing such as raincoats and rain boots were not available. Female team members had difficulties with the heavy loads they had to carry when hiking to reforestation sites, for example, to count the number of trees. BPMET members also felt that LGUs should provide more information regarding the project being monitored.

BPMETs have frequently had to deal with the negative reactions of infrastructure project contractors and workers to their M&E conclusions. In many cases, this led to misunderstandings and strained relationships within the community. Some members said they had been threatened for carrying out their duties. There were also cases of BPMETs having problems in carrying out their work because a contractor was related to an executive official. They recognise that it is important to be patient when explaining their roles and functions to contractors and workers, and observed that these become reasonable once things are explained to them. Also, meetings between different stakeholders conducted at the *barangay* or on site help to overcome differences, misunderstandings and confusions.

BPMET members emphasised the need for an identity card (ID) which they can show when carrying out monitoring activities. Unfortunately, some BPMETs were not issued with IDs because there were not enough resources or time. In some cases,

Above Lessons and recommendations from the BPMET monitoring of swine raising livelihood activities were used by partners in the CHARM2 scale-up area in Pappa, Sablan

Concrete examples

One of the projects described in the final report was one from Banengbeng Sablan, involving a farm-to-market infrastructure project in Sitio Oring, where the BPMET monitoring report showed that the quality of concrete mix being used was inappropriate for the situation. On the basis of this information, the LGU took immediate action and the situation was corrected.

BPMETs have also been involved in the implementation of livelihood projects. In a swine-raising project in Pacso, Kabayan, for example, the results of their monitoring work led to each member having a pig pen to raise pigs and that pig wastes were disposed properly. In other areas, BPMETs have ensured that reforestation areas were protected against burning and that replanting was strictly implemented.

One of the main achievements of the CHARM project has been the formation of BPMETs in the 170 target barangays, and their subsequent training in participatory M&E processes.

shirts with a simple “BPMET” logo were given out during trainings sessions and became a cheap identification substitute.

Another concern has been that BPMET members who were directly involved in the implementation of a project could sometimes find themselves in conflict of interest situations. This has been seen in *barangays* where only a few households were able to implement sub-projects. BPMETs have solved this problem by working as a team to create specific policies and arrangements. One team, for example, excluded a BPMET member from monitoring a project in which she was directly involved. Some teams, however, felt that the involvement of direct beneficiaries could improve sub-project implementation. One of the most common examples cited was when BPMET members themselves worked as labourers on infrastructure projects and could ensure that the project was running according to plan.

BPMET respondents identified the need for resources and support. These included awareness training courses for LGUs and government agencies, as well as communication and documentation equipment (such as cell phones, cameras with GPS capabilities and general office supplies). They also felt that provisions should be made to cover personal accidents and life insurance given the risks associated with their work. Further, they also suggested “baon” or food costs.

Main achievements

One of the main achievement of the CHARM project has been the formation of BPMETs in the 170 target *barangays*, and their subsequent training in participatory M&E processes. In total, there have been 884 men and 582 women involved in these BPMETs.

CHARM2’s preliminary Project Completion Report recognises how BPMETs contribute to standardizing the implementation of sub-projects and increase the chances of sustainability. The report also highlights how BPMETs have been integrated into the formal monitoring team of the municipal LGU, not only for CHARM2 but also for other projects. The report shows that all sub-projects in the *barangays* (from infrastructure to agroforestry and reforestation) benefited from the BPMETs’ work. The preliminary Functionality Assessment Index of Rural Infrastructure Projects on the physical and financial results of CHARM2 concluded that BPMETs involvement led to project outcomes that were better than expected, especially where sustainability was concerned.

It is also said that *barangay* officials have become more active and that the unethical diversion of public funds is minimised. At the same time, rural infrastructure projects are being completed more quickly. A good example of this enhanced performance can be seen in the Benguet LGUs, where the 100% completion of 122 infrastructure sub-projects in the 35 *barangays* has been achieved. Of these 122 sub-projects, 35% were implemented on time and 17% were finished earlier than scheduled. Where delays occurred they were shorter than had previously been experienced.

During the monitoring process, BPMETs also made their communities more aware of *barangay* activities and projects. They gave instructions about how projects should be maintained, and the fact that they were being monitored stimulated community members to improve implementation practices. More in-depth studies are need to establish the links between participatory M&E and the better implementation and sustainability of projects. The general conclusion, however, is that there is a very positive relation.

Mainstreaming BPMET

Most of the BPMETs now monitor projects other than CHARM2. However, BPMET has still not been adopted in LGUs outside the CHARM2 area. Almost all respondents recommended that BPMET becomes a permanent structure in the *barangay*. This would ensure the transparent and continued monitoring of projects, as well as an effective and sustainable implementation. There would also be fewer “shady deals” between LGUs and contractors.

The LGUs also recommend that BPMET becomes a permanent modality in the *barangays*. They acknowledge that LGUs do not have enough staff to conduct frequent monitoring activities. One LGU respondent recommended passing a municipal ordinance with provisions relating to the safety and insurance of BPMET members. Communities also see BPMET as representing them in the monitoring of projects being implemented in their *barangays*.

Yet there are many challenges to mainstreaming BPMETs. One of them is the need to provide incentives. Volunteers have to invest considerable time and effort in these activities, and there are risks involved. Most LGUs do not have the budget to provide for incentives or honoraria for BPMETs. Establishing BPMETs in areas not covered by projects like CHARM2 – which has specific funds for establishing and training BPMETs – will be difficult for LGUs given budget shortages. LGUs also recognise the costs involved in the training.

But an important facilitating factor is the strong encouragement and support for BPMET activities expressed by communities and LGUs themselves.

Another positive factor is the example provided by the municipal legislative body of Atok in accrediting BPMET in recognition of its work. This confirms that a strong relationship based on communication and coordination between stakeholders is important for the work of the BPMETs and their adoption in other *barangays*.

Being based in the *barangay* is the best facilitating factor for mainstreaming. BPMETs consist of community members willing to volunteer and even provide the equipment and tools needed for monitoring activities themselves. Community members volunteer because they are committed to the development of their *barangay* and want to help ensure that all projects are well implemented. Opportunities for learning and personal development, becoming well-known and gaining a reputation in their communities, are also motives that sometimes stimulates volunteers.



Cecil B. Capegsan works as a community development facilitator and assistant coordinator for the Social Mobilization component of the CHARM2 Project.

E-mail: cbcapegsan@yahoo.com